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ABSTRACT

Several models of program review that are used in private colleges are discussed, along with differences between program review models used at public and private colleges, and perspectives on the future of program review at private colleges. Various written materials were examined, and nonstructured interviews were conducted with faculty and administrators at four private colleges in the Midwest and South. Based on content analysis of the data, it was found that, in contrast to the public model, the private colleges lacked uniformity of purpose, criteria, method, and participants. Private colleges also focused on quality as opposed to the public colleges' emphasis on accountability. In the private sector, the outcomes of program review were regarded as an internal evaluation function primarily of concern only to the faculty, administrators, and students, while at public institutions, results of the review were usually reported to the governing board and sometimes to the legislature. Two institutions utilized the goal-based model as part of their accreditation efforts. One institution followed the responsive model of program review, and the last college used the connoisseurship model. It is suggested that private colleges use a more standardized approach in order to allow for greater comparability of results. (SW)

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PROGRAM REVIEW: DIFFERENCES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the San Diego Hilton in San Diego, California, February 14-17, 1987. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

PROGRAM REVIEW: DIFFERENCES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Colleges and universities across the United States are faced with maintaining quality during a period of static or declining budgets. As funds become tighter, governing boards, legislators, and taxpayers demand accountability for the funds being expended toward the support of higher education. In an effort to improve the credibility of higher education and provide accountability, program review has come into vogue to assist colleges and universities in making budgetary and programmatic allocations.

Evidence of the widespread use of program review was found by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) in a 1981 study. Barak found 28 of the state level agencies had authority to review existing programs and most of them exercised that authority. Further evidence was seen in the numbers of institutions that reported undertaking program reviews. In 1986 Barak found that, "approximately 82 percent of colleges and universities (public and independent, two-year and four-year) conducted some kind of formal program review and another 2 percent have indicated that they conducted an informal review of programs" (Barak, 1986, p. 13). The data would indicate that virtually every college and university, regardless of its size or location, has or will shortly begin, the process of academic program reviews.

Public institutions are involved in a considerably higher percentage of program reviews than are private institutions. According to Barak (1986) several factors such as the pressure for accountability, the demands of statewide coordinating/governing boards, and the greater awareness of evaluation and management in the public sector accounts for this difference. In a 1984 survey of State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), Barak found that of the fifty-two agencies surveyed (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico), four (4) states (New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, and Ohio) had the authority to approve all new programs in independent institutions while nine (9) states including Alabama, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia had authority to approve some new academic programs for independent institutions. The number of state agencies with authority to review existing academic programs at independent insitutions is quite small. Barak (1984) reports that only New York has the authority to discontinue all existing academic programs in independent institutions while Connecticut, Illinois and Pennsylvania hae the authority to discontinue some academic programs at independent institutions.

The public sector has seen a dramatic increase in program review activities as documented by Barak (1984,

1986). Likewise, the private sector has also increased its activity in reviewing academic programs but because of the autonomous nature of these institutions, data regarding the scope of these activities has not been collected. The researcher for this study found that much of the efforts in private institutions was being initiated in response to the increased pressure from accrediting agencies, particularly from the Southern Association, as Dr. Ashmore has indicated, for measures of effectiveness.

As independent colleges and universities become increasingly involved in program review activities, the relationship between the public and private sectors of higher education becomes more closely entwined. This relationship is seen most clearly in the accreditation efforts of the six regional accrediting agencies. Accreditation standards are applied uniformly across both public and private sectors, and therefore, when program evaluation is strengthened through the accreditation process, the effects are felt equally in both sectors.

The private sectors of higher education are also affected simply by the sheer volume and numbers of program reviews that are being conducted in the public sector. As the public reviews are publicized through the media, the higher education associations, and the faculty networks, private institutions become pressured to "get on the bandwagon." There is a feeling among some administrators,

in private as well as public institutions, that program review is simply the "thing to do."

There is no question that in the public sector the issue of accountability is the most commonly cited reason for conducting institutional program reviews (Conrad and Wilson, 1985). Accountability also influences the private sector to some degree as administrators and faculty seek to demonstrate through program review that their institution's programs are of high quality. The difference, however, is to whom these institutions are accountable to and for what purpose.

The purpose of this paper is to describe some various models of program review in private institutions, to examine the differences between public and private models of program review and to offer some insights into the future of program review in the private institutions.

THE DIFFERENCES

The research utilized case study methods including interviews, non-participant observations and a document review. Data gathering involved non-structured interviews at four independent institutions in the Midwest and South. Each site was visited and interviews were conducted with both faculty and administrators. In addition, a wide variety of reports, memorandum, notes and newspaper articles were studied for additional background information and data. Institutions were selected which provided a range

of geographic location, size and mission. The enrollments of the institutions varied from 1400 to 3500 FTE and included both institutions with strong undergraduate liberal arts backgrounds as well as institutions with graduate and professional programs.

The data were analyzed utilizing content analysis, "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 240). The researcher sought patterns and shapes during the analysis of the field notes which were then organized against the known characteristics of program review. The analysis of the data revealed three differences between the program review process in independent colleges as compared to the processes at public institutions.

Non-Standardized

A primary characteristic of the program review process in independent colleges is the lack of uniformity of purpose, of criteria, of method, and of participants. For example, at two of the private institutions analyzed in this study, only the graduate programs received any kind of systematic review. The undergraduate programs were reviewed only if a program required it for specialized accreditation such as NCATE or NLN or if the dean or department chair wished to evaluate the programs. As one administrator noted, "There was no formal process, no standard format,

and each dean is free to come up with whatever criteria and format he or she felt was most beneficial" (June, 1986). At another institution in the study, the only formal review process was that done for the regional accreditation site visit. If the academic dean felt that other evaluation efforts were necessary, he had a faculty member who served as an institutional evaluation officer conduct an ad hoc evaluation. At the fourth institution in the study, a consultancy form of program review is utilized. In this case each department chooses a focus for its review and has an outside consultant conduct an on-site extensive, specialized type of evaluation. These reviews typically focus on the quality of the programs but can also focus on curriculia concerns and interpersonal relations.

As evidenced by these examples, a wide diversity of types of program reviews in the private sector can be both a blessing and a curse. The positive aspects are the ability to tailor the design of the review to the specific need of the unit under review. The disadvantage is the loss of comparability with other similar programs or institutional units. The participants in the study commented on the limited usefulness of the data gathered from such focused and ethnocentric types of reviews. They generally felt that the review process confirmed what they already knew about programs but rarely revealed new information or insight. The lack of uniformity is a major

difference of the private model as compared to the public model. The important difference is that while public institutions employ a variety of models for program review such as the goal-based model, the responsive model, the decision-making model, and the connoisseurship model as discussed in Conrad and Wilson (1985), the public institution will use the same model for all units in the institution. The private institutions involved in this limited study indicated the preference to use a variety of models within their institutions and to leave a large part of the design of the process to the faculty and deans.

Focus on Quality

A second characteristic noted among the program review processes at private institutions was the focus on quality as opposed to accountability. As discussed earlier, accountability is the primary reason cited by public institutions for conducting program reviews (Conrad and Wilson, 1985). In the private institutions, programs are almost exclusively reviewed in order to improve the quality of the academic offerings. The fact that the design of the process is so unstructured and left to the discretion of the faculty and departments allows the review process to concentrate on the issues of quality.

In general, there is little reallocation of resources that occurs as a result of the review process in the private institutions, and this is understandable when the

lack of comparability is considered. For example, if one of the focused program review processes reveals a weakness or deficiency in an area under review, it would be difficult to justify the reallocation of funds from another program until that program had also undergone a similar review. Therefore, as long as the private institutions utilize the specialized and unstructured formats of review, the ability to reallocate resources based on such review efforts will be limited.

One institution in the study did report the elimination of certain graduate programs as a result of the review process, but the discontinuance occurred before the review process actually took place. When the institution started the program review process, a cyclical program of review was established. As the time approached for some programs to be reviewed, the faculty and department chairs in this one program declined to be reviewed, and the program went out of existence. One administrator at this institution noted that while this was not a planned part of the process, they were "certainly happy about it" (July, 1986).

Though the focus of the review efforts in the private sector is on quality, there is a feeling among many administrators that the review process does result in a form of accountability. The accountability issue, however, is not the same as in the public model. In public institutions program review is frequently utilized to

assure taxpayers, legislators and governing boards that public funds are being spent efficiently and effectively. This is not the case in the private institutions. The outcomes of the review process in private institutions almost never considers such factors as efficiency or funding levels but rather focuses on the employability of the graduates, number of graduates entering graduate or professional schools and evaluations of students and graduates. The desire then to improve the quality of the programs is seen as a form of accountability to one's students and colleagues. In the private sector, improving quality is viewed as accountability because there is a belief that the higher the quality of individual programs, the better the institution is as a whole. This, in turn, can result in a competitive edge in recruiting students and enhance the reputation of the institution.

Internal Nature of the Reviews

A final difference noted between the way program reviews are conducted in the private sector as compared to the public sector relates to the audience of program reviews. In the public institutions once a program review has been completed, the results of the review are usually reported to the governing board, and, in some cases, even the legislatures. If the results involve some reallocation of resources or program discontinuance, then it is likely that the results will also be reported in the media.

In the private sector the outcomes of the review efforts are almost never reported to the governing board or trustees and certainly never to the public constituencies unless it involves a public relations effort. The private institutions regard program review as an internal evaluation function primarily of concern only to the faculty, administrators and students. In some cases even the presidents of institutions are only given a summary of the results of the review process. The difference noted here reflects a fundamental difference in the nature of control between the two sectors of higher education. The private sector carefully guards its perogatives of internal control and governance and resists any efforts by outside authorities including trustees to intrude into the internal governance of the institution. The differences in the program review process simply exemplify the differences between the two sectors.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the private sector conducts program reviews in some of the same ways that public institutions do. In analyzing the models of review utilized by the institutions in this study, it was determined that three of the four basic models described by Conrad and Wilson (1985) were followed. Two institutions utilized the goal-based model. In this model the evaluation is defined as a "process of identifying program goals, objectives, and

standards of performance, using various tools to measure performance and comparing the data collected against the identified objectives and standards to determine the degree of congruence or discrepancy" (Conrad and Wilson, 1985, p. 20).

The two institutions following the goal-based model basically did program reviews as a part of their accreditation efforts. Therefore, programs were evaluated based on their objectives, how well they met those objectives and how closely they met the standards of the regional accrediting associations.

One institution followed the responsive model of program review. In this case a committee of three reviewers, one external to the institution and two faculty within the institution but outside the department under review, are appointed to conduct the evaluation. The committee conducts an evaluation and reports on the effects or outcomes of the academic programs. In this type of evaluation, the focus is on "program activities than on the program's stated goals and objectives" (Conrad and Wilson, 1985, p. 23) and focuses primarily on the effects on constituents.

The third model utilized by an institution in the study followed the connoisseurship model as identified by Conrad and Wilson (1985). In this model "the evaluation is structured in accordance with the expectations of those

served by the evaluation" (Conrad and Wilson, 1985, p. 28). The connoisseur is an expert in a program area who is retained by the institution to evaluate a specific program. The connoisseur is free to frame the evaluation along whatever criteria he/she deems appropriate and, thus, judges the program based on their own personal, subjective experiences and knowledge. In the case of this institution, the department nominated a list of three to five consultants they wished to have evaluate their program and in discussion with the dean finally selected one expert. The consultant was, however, hired by the dean, and it was clear that the consultant worked for the administration. The administration felt that it was important for the faculty to have an "outside" person to talk to but felt that, in most cases, the consultants simply reaffirmed what they already knew about the program.

Although the data from this limited study found that the private sector employed some of the same models as the public sector, it did find important differences between the two sectors. In the independent institutions, program review tends to be non-standardized following no general criteria, method or purpose. Secondly, the review process in the private sector generally focuses on quality rather than accountability. A final difference noted was the manner in which outcomes of the program review process in the independent institutions are not widely discussed or

reported. The autonomous nature of independent colleges has to this point allowed them to develop program review activities in a variety of manner and methods. In the future it would seem more beneficial to the institutions if a more standardized approach could be taken in order to allow for greater comparability and effectiveness.

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